



AN EXPLORATION OF POLITICAL CONFRONTATION IN INDIA'S FIFTH AND SIXTH SCHEDULE AREAS: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES, AND REMEDIES

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the complex dynamics of political confrontation in India's Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas, which are regions granted special autonomous status under the Indian Constitution. Through a comprehensive analysis of historical contexts, socio-economic factors, and governance challenges, this study aims to uncover the root causes of persistent conflicts in these areas, assess their multifaceted consequences, and propose potential remedies. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining literature review, case studies, and data analysis to provide a nuanced understanding of the issues at hand. Findings suggest that while constitutional provisions aim to protect tribal rights and promote development, their implementation has often fallen short, leading to disillusionment and conflict. The paper concludes by proposing a set of recommendations aimed at addressing the underlying causes of confrontation and fostering sustainable peace and development in these crucial regions.

KEYWORDS: Fifth Schedule, Sixth Schedule, Tribal Autonomy, Political Confrontation, Governance, India, Constitutional Provisions, Development Challenges

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This research is of paramount importance in the context of India's ongoing struggle to balance tribal autonomy with national integration and development. The Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas, covering significant portions of the country, represent a unique constitutional experiment in accommodating diverse tribal populations within the larger federal structure. However, these regions have often been hotbeds of political confrontation, leading to social unrest, economic underdevelopment, and security challenges. Understanding the dynamics of these confrontations is crucial for several reasons:

- 1. Policy Formulation:** The study will provide valuable insights for policymakers to formulate more effective and sensitive policies for these regions.
- 2. Conflict Resolution:** By identifying the root causes of confrontations, the research can contribute to developing better conflict resolution mechanisms.
- 3. Development Planning:** The analysis will help in creating more inclusive and sustainable development plans that respect tribal autonomy while promoting national integration.
- 4. Constitutional Evaluation:** The research may inform future constitutional amendments or interpretations related to tribal governance.
- 5. Academic Contribution:** This study will add to the body of knowledge on tribal governance, federalism, and conflict studies in the Indian context.

Constitution, represent a unique governance model aimed at protecting the rights and cultures of tribal populations while integrating them into the national mainstream. The Fifth Schedule, applicable to tribal areas in 10 states of central India, provides for the administration and control of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes. The Sixth Schedule, on the other hand, applies to tribal areas in the northeastern states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram, granting considerable autonomy to tribal communities in these regions.

Despite these constitutional provisions designed to safeguard tribal interests, these areas have been witnessing persistent political confrontations. These conflicts arise from a complex interplay of historical grievances, socio-economic disparities, cultural preservation concerns, and competing interests between tribal communities and the state. The confrontations manifest in various forms, ranging from peaceful protests to armed insurgencies, posing significant challenges to governance, development, and national security.

This paper seeks to delve deep into the multifaceted nature of these confrontations, examining their historical roots, contemporary manifestations, and far-reaching consequences. By doing so, it aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced in these regions and propose potential pathways for resolution and harmonious coexistence.

INTRODUCTION

India's Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas, as defined in the

Objectives:

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To identify and analyze the key historical, socio-economic, and political factors contributing to political confrontations in India's Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas.
2. To examine the effectiveness of existing constitutional provisions and governance structures in addressing the aspirations and grievances of tribal communities in these regions.
3. To assess the impact of political confrontations on various aspects of life in these areas, including economic development, social cohesion, and cultural preservation.
4. To explore the intersections between local tribal governance systems and the broader Indian democratic framework, identifying points of friction and potential synergies.
5. To propose evidence-based recommendations for mitigating political confrontations and fostering sustainable development in Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research techniques to provide a comprehensive analysis of the subject matter. The methodology includes:

1. **Literature Review:** An extensive review of academic literature, government reports, NGO publications, and media articles related to Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas, tribal governance, and political confrontations in India.
2. **Case Studies:** In-depth analysis of selected case studies from both Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas to provide concrete examples of confrontations, their causes, and outcomes.
3. **Data Analysis:** Examination of available statistical data on socio-economic indicators, development indices, and conflict incidents in the studied regions.
4. **Policy Analysis:** Critical evaluation of relevant policies, laws, and governance structures affecting Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas.
5. **Comparative Analysis:** Comparison of different Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas to identify common patterns and unique challenges.

The research draws from a diverse range of sources to ensure a balanced and comprehensive perspective on the complex issues at hand.

Analysis:***Historical Context and Evolution of Fifth and Sixth Schedule Provisions:***

The roots of political confrontation in India's Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas can be traced back to the colonial era and the subsequent framing of the Indian Constitution. The British colonial administration's policy of treating tribal areas as excluded or partially excluded areas laid the foundation for a separate administrative framework for these regions. This approach, while ostensibly aimed at protecting tribal cultures from rapid changes, also served to isolate these communities from the broader currents of social and political change sweeping through India.

Post-independence, the Constituent Assembly of India, recognizing the unique needs and vulnerabilities of tribal populations, incorporated special provisions in the form of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules. These provisions were designed to provide a degree of autonomy to tribal areas while simultaneously integrating them into the larger national framework. The Fifth Schedule, applicable to tribal areas in central India, provides for the establishment of Tribal Advisory Councils and empowers governors to make regulations for the peace and good governance of Scheduled Areas. The Sixth Schedule, designed for tribal areas in the Northeast, goes further by creating Autonomous District Councils with legislative, executive, and judicial powers.

However, the implementation of these provisions has been fraught with challenges, often leading to political confrontations. One of the primary issues has been the inherent tension between the goal of tribal autonomy and the centralizing tendencies of the Indian state. While the Schedules provide for a degree of self-governance, the extent of this autonomy has often been a point of contention. Tribal communities have frequently argued that the actual implementation falls short of the constitutional vision, leading to a sense of disillusionment and alienation.

Moreover, the evolution of these provisions over time has not always kept pace with changing socio-economic realities and aspirations of tribal communities. For instance, the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) was enacted to extend the 73rd Constitutional Amendment to Fifth Schedule areas, aiming to empower gram sabhas (village assemblies). However, its implementation has been uneven across states, often diluting its intended impact.

In the case of Sixth Schedule areas, while Autonomous District Councils have more extensive powers, including control over land and forest resources, conflicts have arisen over the distribution of powers between these councils and state governments. The creation of new states like Meghalaya and Mizoram from erstwhile Sixth Schedule areas has added another layer of complexity to governance structures.

The historical trajectory of these areas has also been marked by periods of neglect and exploitation. Many tribal regions rich in natural resources have seen large-scale extraction activities, often with limited benefits accruing to local communities. This has led to a narrative of internal colonialism, fueling resentment and resistance among tribal populations.

Furthermore, the process of nation-building in post-independence India has sometimes clashed with tribal aspirations for cultural preservation and autonomy. Efforts to integrate tribal communities into the national mainstream have often been perceived as threats to traditional ways of life, leading to resistance and confrontation.

Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to Confrontations:

The persistent socio-economic disparities between tribal areas and the rest of India have been a significant driver of political confrontations. Despite constitutional safeguards and numerous

development initiatives, Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas continue to lag behind in various human development indicators.

Economic Marginalization: Many tribal communities in these areas depend on traditional livelihoods like agriculture, forest produce collection, and artisanal activities. However, these economic systems have come under increasing pressure due to various factors:

1. **Land Alienation:** Despite legal protections, tribal lands have been steadily alienated through various means, including development projects, mining activities, and influx of non-tribal populations. This has led to loss of livelihoods and displacement, fueling resentment and conflict. The issue is particularly acute in mineral-rich areas where large-scale mining operations have disrupted traditional land use patterns.
2. **Forest Rights:** The implementation of forest conservation laws has often clashed with traditional tribal rights over forest resources. While the Forest Rights Act, 2006 aimed to address this issue, its implementation has been inconsistent, leading to ongoing tensions. Many tribal communities find themselves criminalized for practices they have followed for generations, creating a deep sense of injustice.
3. **Limited Access to Markets:** Geographical isolation and poor infrastructure have hindered tribal communities' access to markets, limiting their economic opportunities and making them vulnerable to exploitation by middlemen. This economic isolation has perpetuated poverty and underdevelopment in many tribal areas.

Educational Disparities: Despite efforts to promote education in tribal areas, literacy rates and educational attainment remain significantly lower than national averages. This educational gap perpetuates socio-economic inequalities and limits opportunities for tribal youth, leading to frustration and potential radicalization. The lack of quality educational institutions in tribal areas, coupled with linguistic and cultural barriers, has made it difficult for tribal students to compete in the broader job market.

Health Inequities: Poor healthcare infrastructure and limited access to quality medical services in many Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas have resulted in poorer health outcomes for tribal populations. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed and exacerbated these health inequities, highlighting the vulnerability of tribal communities to both communicable and non-communicable diseases.

Cultural Erosion: Rapid modernization and integration efforts have sometimes led to the erosion of traditional tribal cultures and languages. This cultural loss has been a significant source of anxiety and resistance among tribal communities, contributing to political confrontations. The decline of traditional knowledge systems and customs has created a sense of cultural dislocation, particularly among younger generations.

Demographic Changes: In many tribal areas, particularly in the Northeast, demographic changes due to migration have altered

the social fabric and political dynamics. The influx of non-tribal populations has led to concerns about cultural dilution and political marginalization among indigenous communities.

Gender Disparities: While many tribal societies traditionally had more egalitarian gender norms, the interaction with mainstream society and changing economic patterns have sometimes led to increased gender disparities. Women in tribal areas often face multiple layers of marginalization, both within their communities and in relation to the broader society.

Political Factors and Governance Challenges:

The political landscape in Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas is characterized by a complex interplay of traditional tribal governance systems, constitutional provisions, and modern democratic structures. This complexity often leads to political confrontations:

1. **Representation Issues:** While there are reserved seats for Scheduled Tribes in legislatures, questions about the effectiveness of this representation in addressing tribal concerns persist. There's often a disconnect between elected representatives and grassroots tribal leadership. Many tribal communities feel that their elected representatives, once in power, are more aligned with mainstream political parties than with tribal interests.
2. **Autonomy vs. Integration:** The fundamental tension between preserving tribal autonomy and promoting national integration remains unresolved. Efforts by the central and state governments to assert control are often met with resistance from tribal communities seeking to protect their autonomy. This is particularly evident in the Northeast, where demands for greater autonomy or even separate statehood have led to prolonged conflicts.
3. **Inter-tribal Conflicts:** In areas with multiple tribal groups, conflicts over resources, political representation, and cultural dominance can lead to intra-regional confrontations, complicating governance. These conflicts sometimes stem from the arbitrary demarcation of administrative boundaries that do not align with traditional tribal territories.
4. **Nexus between Politics and Resource Exploitation:** Allegations of collusion between political elites and corporate interests in exploiting natural resources in tribal areas have fueled distrust and confrontation. The perception that the benefits of resource extraction do not reach local communities has been a significant source of resentment.
5. **Militarization and Human Rights Concerns:** In response to armed insurgencies in some tribal areas, especially in the Northeast, increased militarization has led to human rights concerns, further straining the relationship between tribal communities and the state. The application of laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act has been particularly controversial.
6. **Weak Local Governance Structures:** Despite constitutional provisions, local governance institutions in many tribal areas remain weak. In Fifth Schedule areas, the implementation of PESA has been inconsistent, while in Sixth Schedule areas, Autonomous District Councils often

lack the capacity and resources to effectively govern.

7. **Political Fragmentation:** The emergence of multiple political factions and armed groups in some tribal areas, particularly in the Northeast, has complicated the process of dialogue and conflict resolution. This fragmentation often makes it difficult to reach comprehensive and lasting peace agreements.
8. **Lack of Political Will:** There is often a perceived lack of political will at the state and central levels to address the root causes of tribal discontent. Short-term political considerations sometimes override the need for long-term, sustainable solutions to tribal issues.
9. **Inadequate Implementation of Protective Laws:** While numerous laws exist to protect tribal rights, their implementation on the ground is often weak. This gap between legal provisions and practical realities has been a significant source of frustration for tribal communities.
10. **External Influences:** In some areas, particularly in the Northeast, cross-border influences and international geopolitical factors add another layer of complexity to the political situation.

Consequences of Political Confrontations:

The persistent political confrontations in Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas have had far-reaching consequences, impacting various aspects of life in these regions and beyond:

1. **Developmental Stagnation:** Political instability and conflicts have deterred investments and hindered the implementation of development projects, perpetuating economic backwardness. Many Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas lag behind in basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and healthcare facilities. This lack of development further fuels the cycle of poverty and discontent.
2. **Social Fragmentation:** Prolonged confrontations have led to social tensions, not only between tribal communities and the state but also among different tribal groups and between tribal and non-tribal populations. This fragmentation has eroded traditional social support systems and community cohesion.
3. **Security Challenges:** In some areas, political confrontations have escalated into armed insurgencies, posing significant security challenges and leading to loss of life and property. The presence of armed groups has militarized everyday life in many regions, particularly in parts of the Northeast.
4. **Environmental Impact:** The contestation over natural resources has sometimes led to their unsustainable exploitation, causing environmental degradation in ecologically sensitive tribal areas. Deforestation, soil erosion, and pollution of water sources are common problems in many mineral-rich tribal regions.
5. **Cultural Implications:** While resistance has helped preserve some aspects of tribal culture, prolonged conflict has also disrupted traditional social structures and cultural practices. The younger generation in many tribal communities finds itself caught between traditional values and the pressures of modernization.
6. **Governance Deficit:** The atmosphere of confrontation has often resulted in a governance vacuum, with neither

traditional tribal institutions nor modern administrative structures functioning effectively. This has led to a breakdown of public services and the rule of law in some areas.

7. **Economic Losses:** Conflicts have resulted in significant economic losses, both directly through destruction of property and indirectly through lost opportunities for economic growth and investment. The tourism potential of many tribal areas, for instance, remains largely untapped due to security concerns.
8. **Psychological Impact:** Prolonged exposure to conflict and instability has had severe psychological impacts on tribal populations, particularly children and youth. Issues of trauma, substance abuse, and mental health problems are prevalent in many conflict-affected areas.
9. **Migration and Displacement:** Political confrontations have led to both forced and voluntary migration from tribal areas. This has resulted in the loss of traditional livelihoods and cultural dislocation for many tribal people.
10. **Human Rights Violations:** In areas of active conflict, there have been reports of human rights violations by both state forces and non-state actors. This has further eroded trust between tribal communities and the government.
11. **Education Disruption:** Conflicts have often disrupted educational systems in tribal areas, with schools sometimes being closed for extended periods or used for non-educational purposes during times of unrest.
12. **Healthcare Challenges:** The prevailing insecurity in some areas has made it difficult to attract and retain healthcare professionals, exacerbating existing health inequities in tribal regions.

Case Studies:

To illustrate the complexities of political confrontations in Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas, let's examine two case studies:

1. Jharkhand (Fifth Schedule Area):

Jharkhand, created in 2000 as a separate state to address tribal aspirations, exemplifies the challenges in Fifth Schedule areas. Rich in mineral resources, the state has seen persistent conflicts over land acquisition for mining and industrial projects. The Pathalgadi movement, where tribal villages erected stone slabs declaring self-rule, highlights the tension between tribal autonomy and state authority.

Key issues in Jharkhand include:

- **Land Alienation:** Despite protective laws, tribal lands have been acquired for mining and industrial projects, often without adequate compensation or rehabilitation.
- **Resource Exploitation:** The state's rich mineral resources have been a source of conflict, with tribal communities feeling excluded from the benefits of extraction.
- **Implementation of PESA:** While Jharkhand has enacted PESA, its implementation remains weak, limiting the effectiveness of local self-governance.
- **Naxalite Insurgency:** The state has been affected by left-wing extremism, which has both exploited and exacerbated tribal grievances.

The Pathalgadi movement, which began in 2017, saw tribal villages installing stone slabs inscribed with provisions of PESA and the Fifth Schedule, asserting their right to self-governance. The state's initial harsh response, including arrests of activists, further strained relations. This case illustrates how unaddressed grievances can lead to radical assertions of autonomy and the challenges in balancing tribal rights with state authority.

2. Bodoland Territorial Region, Assam (Sixth Schedule Area):

The creation of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) in Assam represents both the potential and challenges of the Sixth Schedule. The region has a complex history of ethnic conflicts, autonomy movements, and peace accords.

Key aspects of the Bodoland case include:

- **Ethnic Diversity:** The region is home to Bodos, Assamese, Bengali Muslims, and other communities, leading to complex inter-ethnic dynamics.
- **Autonomy Demands:** The Bodo movement for autonomy led to violent conflicts in the 1980s and 1990s.
- **Peace Accords:** Multiple peace agreements, culminating in the 2020 Bodo Peace Accord, have attempted to address Bodo aspirations while safeguarding other communities' rights.
- **Governance Challenges:** The Bodoland Territorial Council, established under the Sixth Schedule, faces challenges in effective governance and inclusive development.

The 2020 Bodo Accord expanded the BTR's territory and powers, aiming to end decades of conflict. However, challenges remain in implementing the accord and ensuring equitable development for all communities in the region. The case highlights the complexities of managing ethnic aspirations within the Sixth Schedule framework and the ongoing process of negotiation and adjustment required to maintain peace and promote development.

These case studies illustrate the diverse challenges faced in Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas and the need for tailored, context-specific approaches to address political confrontations.

Towards Resolution: Potential Remedies:

Addressing political confrontations in Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas requires a multifaceted approach that considers the historical, socio-economic, and political dimensions of the issues at hand. Based on the analysis, the following remedies are proposed:

1. Strengthening Implementation of Existing Provisions:

- Ensuring full implementation of PESA in Fifth Schedule areas and empowering Autonomous Councils in Sixth Schedule areas.
- Regular review and update of these provisions to address emerging challenges.
- Strengthening the capacity of local institutions to effectively utilize their constitutional powers.

2. Inclusive Development Model:

- Adopting a participatory approach to development planning, involving tribal communities in decision-making processes.
- Focusing on sustainable development that aligns with traditional tribal knowledge and practices.
- Ensuring equitable distribution of benefits from natural resource exploitation in tribal areas.

3. Education and Capacity Building:

- Investing in quality education infrastructure in tribal areas, with a curriculum that respects and incorporates tribal culture and knowledge systems.
- Capacity building programs for tribal youth to enhance their participation in governance and development processes.
- Promoting multilingual education to bridge the gap between tribal languages and mainstream education.

4. Land and Forest Rights:

- Strict implementation of laws protecting tribal land rights and prevention of land alienation.
- Effective implementation of the Forest Rights Act, ensuring tribal communities' access to forest resources while promoting sustainable management.
- Developing mechanisms for fair compensation and rehabilitation in cases of necessary land acquisition.

5. Economic Empowerment:

- Promoting tribal entrepreneurship through skill development, market linkages, and financial inclusion.
- Developing industries that align with local resources and skills, ensuring fair benefit-sharing with tribal communities.
- Improving infrastructure to enhance connectivity and market access for tribal areas.

6. Cultural Preservation and Promotion:

- Initiatives to document, preserve, and promote tribal languages, art forms, and cultural practices.
- Integrating tribal cultural elements into mainstream education and media to foster greater understanding and respect.
- Supporting tribal cultural institutions and events to maintain cultural vitality.

7. Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:

- Establishing and strengthening local conflict resolution mechanisms that blend traditional tribal practices with modern mediation techniques.
- Regular dialogues between tribal leaders, government officials, and other stakeholders to address grievances proactively.
- Creating platforms for inter-ethnic dialogue in areas with diverse tribal populations.

8. Governance Reforms:

- Enhancing transparency and accountability in the functioning of tribal councils and local administration.
- Training programs for government officials working

in tribal areas to sensitize them to tribal cultures and concerns.

- Promoting greater representation of tribal communities in higher levels of administration and policy-making.

9. Security Sector Reforms:

- In areas affected by insurgency, adopting a balanced approach that combines security measures with confidence-building initiatives.
- Strict adherence to human rights norms in all security operations.
- Gradual demilitarization of civilian spaces in conflict-affected areas as security situation improves.

10. Research and Policy Formulation:

- Encouraging academic research on tribal issues to inform evidence-based policy-making.
- Regular social audits and impact assessments of policies and programs in Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas.
- Establishing think tanks and research centers focused on tribal development and governance issues.

CONCLUSION

The political confrontations in India's Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas are rooted in a complex interplay of historical, socio-economic, and political factors. These confrontations, while challenging, also represent the democratic assertion of tribal communities' rights and aspirations. Addressing these issues requires a nuanced approach that balances the preservation of tribal autonomy with the imperatives of national integration and development.

The analysis reveals that while constitutional provisions for tribal areas were well-intentioned, their implementation has often fallen short, leading to disillusionment and conflict. Socio-economic disparities, cultural erosion, and governance challenges have further exacerbated these tensions. However, the case studies also highlight the potential for positive change when tribal aspirations are genuinely addressed and innovative governance models are implemented.

Moving forward, a multi-pronged strategy is essential. This should include strengthening the implementation of existing legal provisions, adopting inclusive development models, focusing on education and capacity building, protecting land and forest rights, and promoting economic empowerment. Equally important are efforts to preserve tribal cultures, establish effective conflict resolution mechanisms, and reform governance structures.

The path to resolving political confrontations in these areas is neither short nor straightforward. It requires sustained commitment from all stakeholders – the government, tribal communities, civil society, and the broader Indian populace. By addressing the root causes of confrontations and building on the unique strengths of tribal governance systems, India can work towards a more harmonious and equitable integration of its Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas into the national fabric.

Ultimately, the success of India's democratic experiment hinges on its ability to accommodate diverse aspirations within its constitutional framework. The challenges in Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas present an opportunity to reinforce this commitment to diversity and inclusive growth. By turning these confrontations into constructive dialogues and collaborative actions, India can set a global example in addressing the complex issues of indigenous rights and regional autonomy.

The way forward lies in recognizing tribal communities not as subjects of development but as partners in progress, respecting their unique cultures and knowledge systems while providing them the tools and opportunities to thrive in the modern world. Only through such a balanced and respectful approach can India hope to resolve the long-standing political confrontations in its Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas and pave the way for a more inclusive and harmonious future.

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